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MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSES AMONG NIGERIAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS: FAD OR REALITY?

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Abstract:
Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has been hinted and painted by its providers as an educational innovation with an unprecedented potential to bridge knowledge gap especially for the developing countries that continually struggle to catch up with the rest of the world. This study investigated the present state of MOOCs among Nigerian postgraduate students. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study and purposive random sampling technique was adopted to select three federal universities approved to run postgraduate programme by the National University Commission in the Southwest, Nigeria. A self-structured questionnaire with reliability coefficient of 0.70 was used for data collection. The findings revealed that there is prevalence of digital internet-enabled devices among Nigerian postgraduate students; however, their interest and involvement towards MOOCs is still very low. In addition, the level of awareness of MOOCs among Nigerian postgraduate students is still shallow. Furthermore, the few that enrolled in MOOCs is basically for employment or job advancement.

Keywords: MOOCs, postgraduate students, internet, higher education, online education

1. Introduction

Education has been widely considered as one of the many determinants that could boost individual's productivity and economic growth of any country. For a nation like

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Nigeria to reach her peak in technology and economic height, more emphasis should be placed on education. The Nigerian educational system has however been bedevilled with challenges ranging from underfunding, shortage of learning resources such as poorly equipped laboratories, out-dated libraries, as well as unplanned expansion of enrolment which eventually leads to oversupply of graduates to the labour market and many others. All these challenges limit Nigerian graduates to favourably compete with their contemporaries from other climes.

It is not a new phenomenon in social discourse about the quality of Nigerian graduates where employers asserted that Nigerian university graduates are: (i) poorly trained and unproductive on the job; (ii) not skilful which made them to gradually deteriorated over the past decade; (iii) not fluent in oral and written communications as well as technical skills (Dabalen, Oni and Adekola, 2010). Hence, it has increased the firms' operating cost, reduced their profitability and dwindled their competiveness. This has thus caused a lot of concern to answer how the graduates are trained although they are certified, yet unemployable.

As the world has turned into a global village, instructional activities has thus transcended beyond the four corners of the classrooms. This is the age where learners are dispersed by locations but converged under a virtually cooperative instructional atmosphere to meet the 21st century educational challenges. Technology has made learning possible through open online education. Open courseware (OCW) was initiated by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2001. MIT made all its courses for use by anyone at no cost via the internet, making knowledge available for all. The utilization of OCW is facilitated by the legal use of open licenses that gives users certain rights to reuse, remix as well as retain instructional contents (Wiley, 2014). In furtherance to digital openness comes Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). MOOCs are online courses that offer online learning to anyone with internet connection. The courses may range from sciences to social sciences under the tutelage of professors from elite campuses. MOOCs ensure automated self-testing, peer-review and certifications of different kinds which is not for credits (James and Christian, 2016). MOOCs champions (i) open entry (ii) freedom of time (iii) freedom of place (iv) freedom of pace (iv) freedom of place (v) open programming or curriculum (vi) open to all people and target groups (Mulder, 2015).

MOOCs were initiated by S. Donnes and G. Siemens in 2005. It was envisioned as a platform for supporting connectivist and open learning (Kovanovic, Joksimovic, Gasevic, Siemens and Hatala, 2015). This type of MOOCs is tagged cMOOCs because if focuses on network and discussion-based learning. By 2012, the name MOOCs however came to limelight after three open online courses by Stanford University (Friedman, 2012). This type of MOOCs is tagged xMOOCs which is structured towards traditional

online higher education courses where students watch video lectures and read assigned materials (Kovanovic, et al., 2015).

MOOCs are usually provided by universities in conjunction with private companies and consortia such as edX, Coursera, Udacity, FutureLearn and many others (Kovanovic, et al., 2015) that are renowned in developing and delivering MOOCs. It is noteworthy to state that no Nigerian university has yet collaborated with any of these developing companies to develop and deliver MOOCs (Agbu, J.O., Vries, F., Mulder, F., Tenebe, V., and Caine, A., 2016). Based on the recent findings of Kpolovie and Iderima (2016), who submitted that amongst the four categories of university students in Nigeria – conventional, National Open University, Open Distance Learner, and Postgraduate students; the postgraduate students shows an incomparable superiority readiness for xMOOCs in Nigeria.

Students enrolled into MOOC for various reasons ranging from (i) obtaining knowledge and skills; (ii) personal challenge; (iii) employment or job advancement opportunities (iv) entertainment value of the course (v) gaining friends and social understanding (Alanna, 2013). The authors are not trying to depict MOOCs as flawless educational innovations as its limitation which ranges from inability of developing countries to adapt, localize the instructional contents due to copyright protection (Valentin, Nafukho, Johnson, Valentin, and LeConte).

2. Statement of Problem

Although, MOOCs was not originally targeted for developing countries, its massive openness has been gateway for lingering knowledge gap in developing countries. Despite the media hype by its sponsors and providers as an instructional platform where instruction could diffuse from the region of higher concentration of knowledge under the tutelage of world renowned university professors, it is worth determining the interest and involvement of Nigerian postgraduate students towards MOOCs as they have been touted unemployable.

3. Research Question

The following research question guided this study:

a. What is the interest and involvement of Nigerian postgraduate students towards MOOCs?
b. What is the level of awareness of MOOCs among Nigerian postgraduate students?
c. What is the rationale for enrolling into a MOOCs class?

4. Methodology

The population for the study comprised of students from three federal government universities in Southwest, Nigeria approved by National Universities Commissions to run postgraduate program. The universities are: The University of Ibadan, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Proportional stratified sampling technique was used to randomly select 1200 postgraduate students from Masters, M. Phil and PhD levels in the three institutions selected such that each level is proportional to the existing population of the students at the levels. The instrument used for data collection was researchers' developed and validated questionnaire which has correlation coefficient of 0.70. The questionnaire was divided into two sections A and B. Section A consisted of students' bio data while Section B consisted of 10 item questions which focused on Nigerian postgraduate students' perception about MOOCs. The data obtained from the instrument was subjected to descriptive analysis using percentage.

5. Results and Discussions

Table 1: Showing the interest and level of awareness of MOOCs among Nigerian postgraduate students

s/n	Questionnaire items	Yes		No	
		f	%	*f*	%
1	Have you enrolled in an online class before?	790	65.8	410	43.2
2	Are you interested in online class?	911	75.9	289	24.1
3	Was the online class open to everyone and is it completely free?	480	40	720	60
4	Are you aware of Massive Open Online courses (MOOCs)?	350	29.2	850	70.8
5	Have you enrolled in MOOCs class such as edX, Udacity, FutureLearn, etc.	357	29.8	843	70.3
6	Did you complete the enrolled courses in MOOCs class?	297	24.8	853	75.3
7	Were you certified after the completion of the MOOCs class?	261	21.8	939	78.3
8	Do you see MOOCs as an educational innovation to enhance learners' competitiveness?	255	21.3	945	78.8

The findings from the study revealed that online class is not strange to Nigerian postgraduate students as 65.8% of respondent had enrolled in online class while 75.9% of the respondents are interested in it. It is however surprising that 70.8% of the respondents have not enrolled in MOOOCs hosted on the servers of big actors like edX, Udacity, Futurelearn, etc. In addition, the findings showed that 24.8% of those who enrolled in MOOCs completed their course(s). It is interesting to note that 21.8% of the respondents were certified after the completion of their course while 78.8% of the

respondents did not approve MOOCs as an educational innovation to enhance learners' competitiveness.

Table 2: Revealing the rationale for enrolling in MOOCs and the devices used in accessing the internet

	Rationale for enrolling in MOOCS	**Responses**	
		f	%
a	Personal challenge	60	5
b	Employment/job advancement opportunities	888	74
c	Acquisition of knowledge and skill	120	10
d	Entertainment value of the course	96	8
e	Social understanding and development of mutual friends	36	3
	Devices used in accessing the internet		
a	Smart phones	852	71
b	Laptops	312	26
c	Other devices	36	3

The findings also identified that smart phones are major device used in accessing the internet as 71% of respondents affirmed to this while 26% of respondents uses laptop to access the internet. This is corroborates with the findings Boga and McGreal which affirmed that mobile phones are ubiquitous in the developing world as most people are familiar with its usage which goes in line with constructive principles upon which MOOCs are based. In addition, 74% of the respondents enrol in MOOCs for employment or job advancement opportunities while 10% enrolled in MOOCs to acquire knowledge and skill.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The study revealed that there is prevalence of digital internet-enabled devices however, the interest and involvement as well as awareness of Nigerian postgraduate students towards MOOC is still low. In addition, the few that enrolled in MOOCs is basically for employment or job advancement. MOOCs is enjoying unprecedented attention from educational research community due to growing number of conferences, journals, and research papers credited to MOOCs towards its applicability to developing countries. The authors thus conclude that Nigerian universities should partner with MOOCs providers so as to give it a brand that could be easily acceptable to Nigerian students. In addition, the language of instruction of MOOCs should be easier to understand for Nigerian postgraduate students to prevent high drop out.

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